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UNCLAS BRATISLAVA 000330

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FOR GENERAL FOGLESONG FROM AMBASSADOR WEISER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF GEN ROBERT H. FOGLESONG,
COMMANDER U.S. AIR FORCES IN EUROPE AND ALLIED AIR FORCES
NORTH

1. (U) Summary and Introduction: Welcome to Slovakia! I regret that I will not be able to join you in Sliac. I expect that you will have a productive visit on April 5 and learn first-hand how Slovakia will contribute to the Alliance. I hope you will have the opportunity to return to Slovakia soon and visit Kuchyna, the Slovak range near Bratislava where the 16th Air Force has trained on several occasions. I look forward to welcoming you then.

2. (SBU) Your visit provides the opportunity to:

--welcome the Slovak Air Force as a new member of the Alliance, expressing confidence that cooperation between Slovakia and fellow NATO members will continue to deepen and encouraging them to consider tactical airlift (C-130) for the future;

--thank the GOS for their contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom as well as their intended deployment to ISAF in May, encouraging them to continue to contribute to the war on terrorism despite the recent barbaric attacks on military forces and civilian populations of coalition members;

--encourage the GOS to stay the course on military reform and professionalization.

There will be a press conference during which Slovak journalists will likely ask questions about Slovakia's NATO membership, specifically how Slovakia's Air Forces will be integrated into NATO and what the Slovak Air Force's contribution brings to the Alliance. In addition, reporters may inquire about Slovakia's participation in both OEF and OIF.

Political Dynamics

3. (SBU) Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda's government is a center-right coalition made up of four parties that were elected in the fall of 2002 to a four-year term. Although this government is more ideologically coherent than its predecessor, also led by Dzurinda, it has faced considerable challenges since its formation. Dzurinda recalled Minister of Defense Ivan Simko in September 2003 for what he described as insubordination. Simko would not support the PM's decision to recall the head of the National Security Office (NBU), which issues NATO security clearances. Juraj Liska, a member of Dzurinda's party and former mayor of Trencin, was named Defense Minister in October.

4. (SBU) On April 3 Slovakia will hold the first round of presidential elections. The president has little formal power in Slovakia, but can influence decisions by using his office as a bully pulpit and can veto legislation. There are currently 11 candidates in the race, but only three--including Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan, former PM Vladimir Meciar, and former speaker of parliament Ivan Gasparovic--have any real chance of making it into a second round. A second round between the top two vote getters will be held on April 17 if no candidate wins at least 50 percent of the vote.

5. (SBU) Opposition parties and labor unions have organized a referendum for April 3 calling for early elections which will be held concurrently with the presidential elections. Slovakia has had only one successful referendum since independence with the others failing due to a lack of voter turnout. All public opinion polls to date suggest that this one will fail as well due insufficient turnout. The referendum is non-binding, so the decision to hold early elections would still have to be made in parliament, where it would likely fail.

Defense Spending

6. (SBU) The Slovaks committed to spending 2 percent of GDP

after the Prague Summit. For 2004, the defense budget is 1.81 percent of GDP, but additional outlays, including settlement of Soviet-era debt, should bring total defense spending to 2.02 percent. However, Finance Minister Miklos

has argued strongly that defense spending be cut and it is unclear whether the GOS and parliament have the willpower to keep defense spending at a real 2 percent in the out years.

OIF/OEF/ISAF

17. (SBU) Per capita, Slovakia is one of the most active international peace-keeping nations with approximately 750 personnel deployed in 11 missions. The GOS, with only minimal public backing, strongly supported the war in Iraq and sent a chem-bio consequence management unit to Kuwait under Czech command. After the end of hostilities, the unit (82-strong) was replaced with an engineering unit (105 soldiers) that is currently deployed in the Polish sector.

18. (SBU) The Slovaks also have a 40-person air-field construction unit deployed as part of OEF at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. Their six-month mandate has been extended three times. PM Dzurinda visited this unit in January. The Slovaks will send a 15-person demining team to Afghanistan under ISAF command in May, their first mission as a NATO member under the NATO flag.

Military Reform

19. (SBU) This year the Ministry of Defense will conduct a mid-course review of its long-term military reform strategy Force 2010. The review will take into account changes in NATO Force Goals as well as different realities in Slovakia. The Slovaks are committed to developing their chemical defense unit as a niche capability for NATO. The other niche capabilities they have identified are military police and engineers.

110. (SBU) Defense Minister Liska commissioned a new study on the air force which recommended extending the life of 10 MiG-29s plus 2 trainers, rather than follow the paths of their neighbors and issue a tender for fighters. The study also suggested upgrading 18 Mi-24 attack helicopters, but the Slovaks plan to upgrade 10. In addition, the study recommended acquiring 2-4 medium lift transport aircraft by 2010. They are considering acquiring C-130s under the Excess Defense Articles program. This proposal is still in the early stages, but the Slovaks are very interested. We have encouraged Liska to incorporate the study within the larger context of Force 2010.

111. (SBU) Major General Jozef Dunaj, Commander of the Slovak Air Force, is not a fan of the F-16. He supports MiG-29 upgrades as a stopgap measure, but would prefer to see Slovakia acquire F-18s or Joint Strike Fighters in the future. MajGen Dunaj is likely to inquire about USAFE's support for the Bratislava air show (SIAD) on June 12-13, 2004. USDAO has already forwarded requests for participation by USAFE, based on requests from the Slovak Air Force, namely flying displays of F-15 and F-117 aircraft and static displays of KC-135 and A-10A aircraft. Dunaj will also seek a commitment for increased contact and training opportunities for 16th Air Force, using the training range at Kuchyna/Malacky airbase.

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